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CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

35

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C H E C K

185
AUG

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

Even after all of this time of writing these columns on self-publishing, I still get mail from would-be cartoonists who are missing the point. So, I'm going to try to address a basic fundamental that seems to be central to many of the inquiries.

Self-publishing does not just happen. Even if I put everything that I know about self-publishing into a single volume and mailed a copy free to everyone who wrote in asking for advice, self-publishing would not just happen. One of the biggest obstacles you are going to face in trying to self-publish is your own inertia. Jeff Smith's standard advice is to 'do your homework'. By this he means that you should find out everything about publishing and distribution before you even attempt to enter the field. 'Doing your homework' is very different, however, from the traditional view of that phrase, which has come to mean (in the last half of the twentieth century) send a list of thirty-five questions to an expert and then sit back and wait for a reply.

Understand this:

Not only doesn't the world revolve around you, NOTHING revolves around you. You are a human being. Picture yourself as a planet. Your talent, your intended comic book, your story-to-be is your molten core. It is up to you to make an environment for that molten core which is conducive to growth, which will permit your talent to flourish in a hostile world. There are any number of ways to go about this. I always recommend that the story has to come first. You have to have something to say. The only way to find out if you have something to say and the determination and work ethic to see it through to its conclusion is to make a start and stick with it. I find, at this point, that most would-be self-publishers' eyes start to glaze over.

SNAP SNAP.

WAKE UP!

You have to make a start and stick with it. Rather than self-publishing *Bone* as he did, Jeff could have done *Bone* mini-comics and sold them through a dozen stores in the immediate vicinity, while maintaining his animation studio. He could have done *Bone* as a series of Sunday comics style pages and gotten them published in a local weekly newspaper, while maintaining his animation studio. *Bone* was (and is) a solid, commercially viable, interesting idea. It is well-executed. *That* had to be there before anything *else* could be there. It is futile to talk about promotion, distribution, the mechanics of self-publishing unless and until that basic requirement has been fulfilled. Deciding to self-publish on the basis of eight pages of the start of the story, or ten pages or twenty pages or fifty pages, is the equivalent of expecting to get a job at Disney with the first fifty animation cells that you've ever drawn. It just doesn't work that way. It just doesn't. You have to make a start and stick with it. You will know when you're on the right track, but *until* you're on the right track, you're going to *think* that you're on the right track. This is a tough point to understand. It is possible to work for two years on something (I did a weekly strip for two years before I did *Cerebus*) and have it be the wrong thing. If it's the wrong thing, nothing will happen, no matter if you get a Xeric Grant and a circulation of twenty thousand copies. If there's something in the back of your head that keeps gnawing at you while you're developing one story, start putting the one that's gnawing at you down on paper. I was convinced that I was either a newspaper strip artist, a political cartoonist or a short story comic book writer/artist through most of the 1970's. Then I decided I was an inker. Then I decided I was a magazine cartoonist.

The key was that I kept trying all of the options that were out there. I pursued each of them with great determination. I never quit on anything. But nothing 'happened'. At any point, I could have been working on a super-hero series I created for a publisher (*Revolt 3000*) or drawing and lettering a story from someone else's script (*Phantacea*) or doing political cartoons for the local paper. In each of those cases, it went for a little while and then it died, usually in a period of a few months. Each thing told me, 'well, I guess that wasn't it.' The difference with writing and drawing and self-publishing *Cerebus* was overwhelming. Things got in the way, but I could go over, around or through them. That's what told me that *Cerebus* was 'it'.

With comic book companies coming into existence, vanishing without a trace, being taken over; with the amount of submissions playing 'red light green light red light', there is no shortage of places to find out what 'isn't it'.

Keep working your way through the maze. You'll know what it is when it happens, but you won't know until then.

'God grinds the axes he intends to use.'

CEREBUS

NO. 185 **AUGUST 1994**

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

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BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

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BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

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BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)

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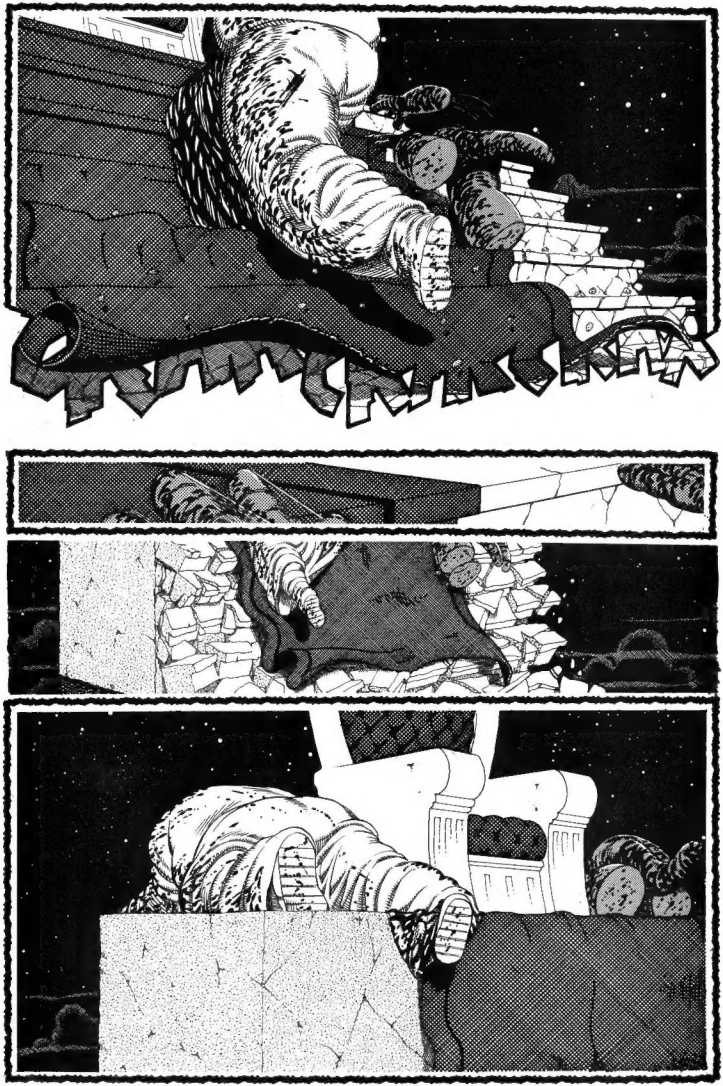
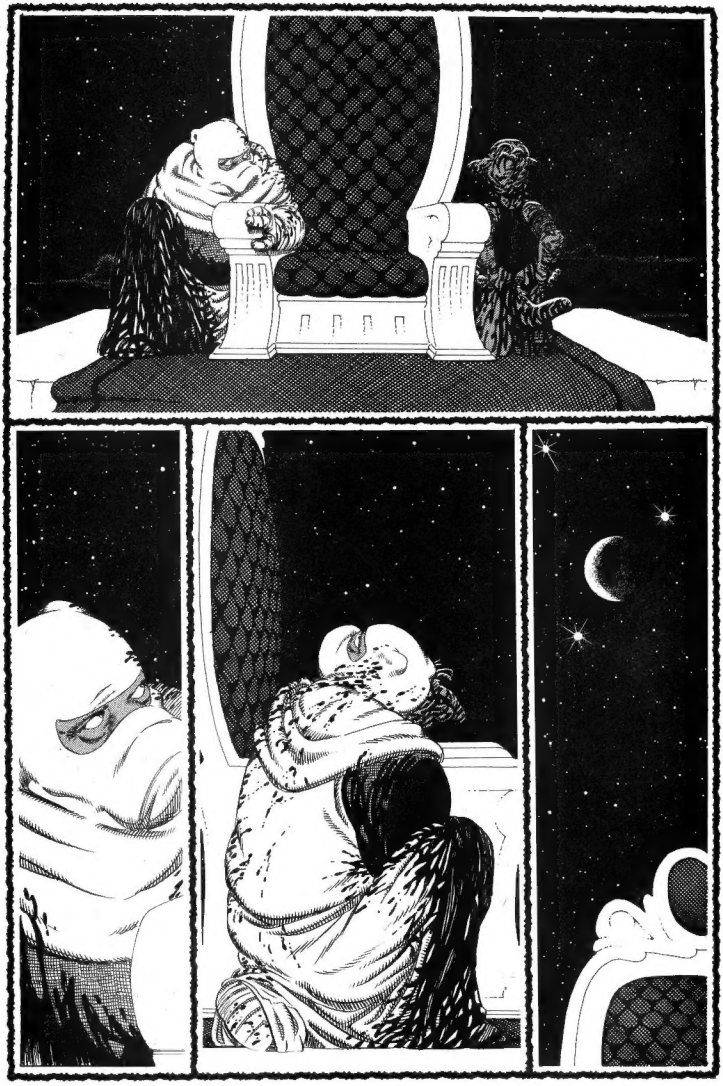
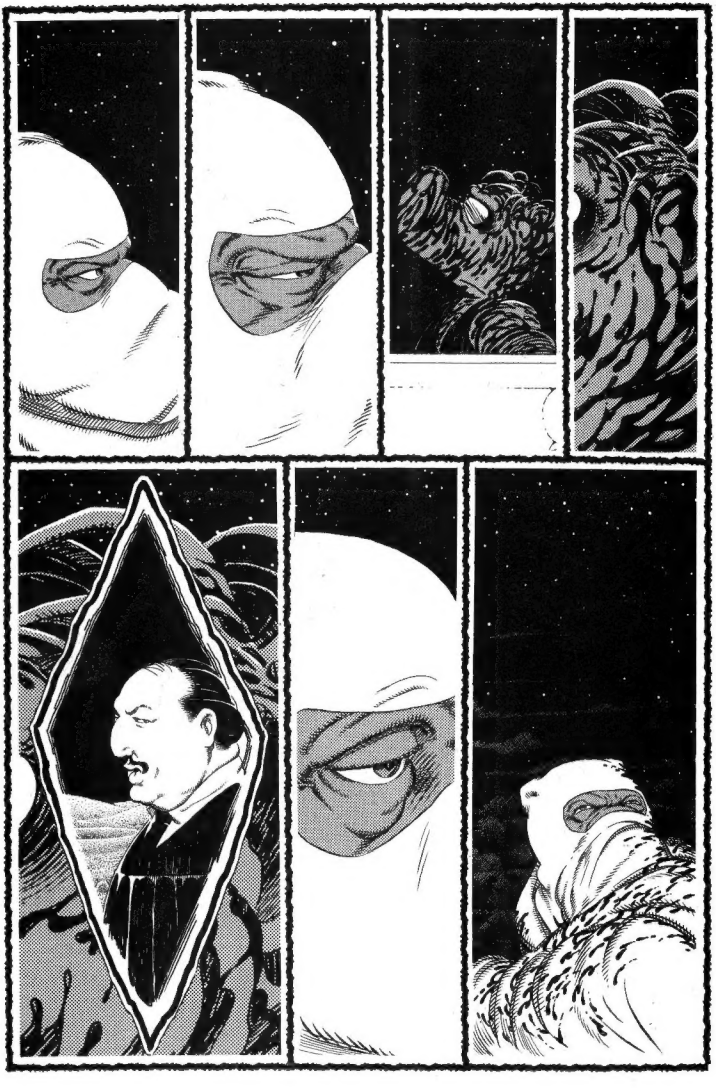
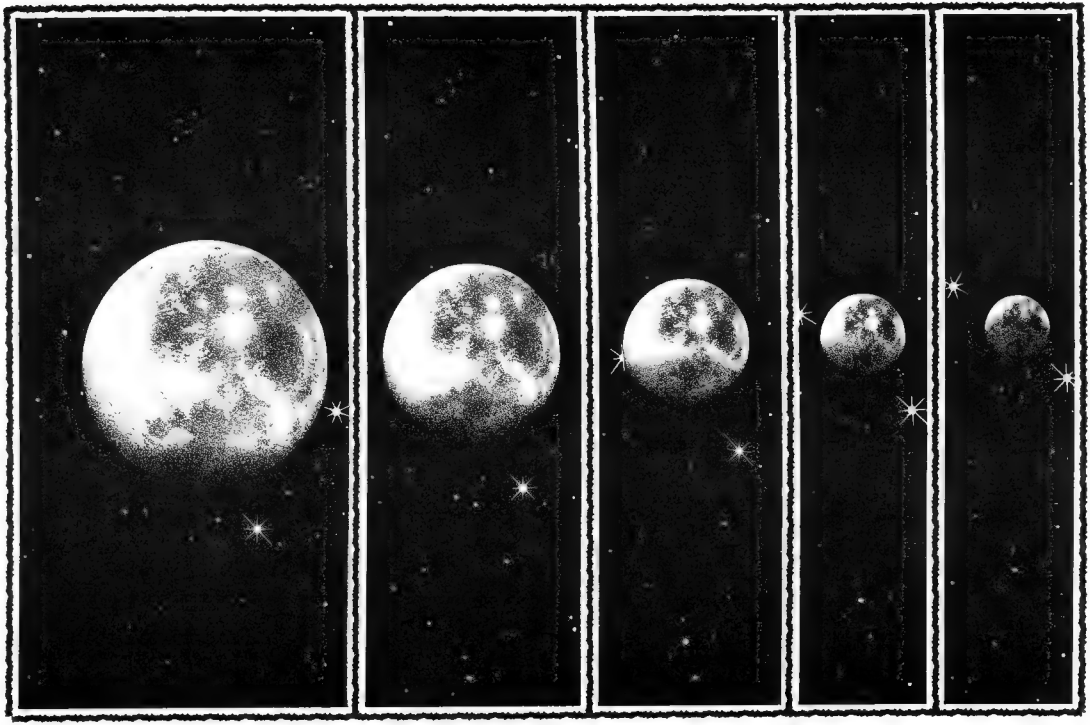
WARRIOR









he reader had returned.

The forward screen of the orbiter (or whatever it was) was much larger now and the cramped confines of the cabin had grown more spacious. The reader reclined, gazing up at the thing. Him, *Viktor Davis had said.* It, *thought the reader, still stinging from the author's rebuke the issue before.* Him/her *possibly* (possibly*).*

A 'her' at the end of *Church & State* did not become a 'him' at the end of *Reads* just because Viktor Fucking Davis had changed his mind. Exception and *Consensus.* The reader had been lumped into the latter category and bristled inwardly at the recollection. 'Lunatic and *Realist*' was more like it. Without the presence of Exception (Teacher's Fucking Pet was more like it) and Viktor Fucking Davis, the reader was now capable of relaxing and . . . just ***looking*** at him . . . it . . . possibly him/her (***possibly***).

It ***was*** extraordinary. The reader wished for a video camera: all of the curious permutations and imagery which swam across its face, each variation provoking a different emotional reaction, the reader's reactions themselves often inexplicable (***why*** was that one so poignant — ***that*** one, just now) and equally transitory. Now joy, ***joy,*** JOY! The reader squirmed pleasurably in the recliner. That was the reader's favourite. No question about it. With a video camera, the reader could record the thing for hours at a time and edit out all of the ones that the reader didn't like. Well, not didn't ***like***; it was all ***extraordinary,*** awe-inspiring, blah, blah, blah. But the reader couldn't help thinking what an entire tape (two hours, three hours) of the joyful ones would be like. Or a collection of tapes, filed away by category. Joy, poignancy, sadness, anger. The reader could just select the tape that suited the reader's mood — or the reader's ***desired*** mood. And music. There was no music. No sound whatsoever. The reader could put on a favourite CD that matched the mood on the tape. Although, as the reader sat staring at it, no music came to mind. Rather, several bits of favourite songs played briefly and unsatisfyingly in the reader's recollection, each of them somehow . . . overwhelmed . . . by him. It. Vaguely irritated by this, the reader began to wonder if the reader hadn't been too hasty in dismissing 'haughty' as a suitable adjective. The reader settled back and impatiently awaited the next 'joy' one. There really should be a schedule of 'starting times', thought the reader. Like *TV Guide* or . . .

The reader drew a sharp intake of breath. It suddenly began to accelerate in its (or her/its) movements. Not until that moment had the reader thought that there might be such . . . variation. The reader waited for Viktor Davis' narration to resume or an on-screen explanation to appear. The reader was transfixed; the reader's first awe-stricken reaction at the sight of him (it!) returned. What was going on? What was he (it!) doing? Until that moment, all movement had been regular, wave-like. There had been small, subtle variances, a shifting of tempo, but now . . . now . . .

The accelerating movement was centrifugal. Its axis seemed to shift. There were still shapes that formed, images roiling in the rotating mass of the thing, but it was no longer calm; all serenity had vanished. Beads of sweat stood out on the reader's forehead; the reader's heart was pounding. Fear and exhilaration, exhilaration and fear. Fuck joy, thought the reader. This is a hundred times better, a THOUSAND times better. The movement accelerated, faster and faster about an epicenter. The reader thought of the Giant Red Spot on Jupiter. And now a column began rising from that Eye, from that Center. It was a funnel cloud of immaculate energy. Within the reader exhilaration began to fade even as fear claimed dominance. The column was pulsating, wave upon wave of brilliance feeding into it from the thing itself. It surged up and out, and then a mighty wave of energy convulsed about the thing, converging on that (cyclone? tornado?): rising within it until it disgorged a perfect, radiant teardrop shape that . . . and ***another!*** longer this time! distended and more fully . . . *Another! Braided! Woven!* Fragmenting into bead-like shapes, strands of radiance brilliant against the hard vacuum. It was . . .

It was . . .

'Ejaculating,' ejaculated Viktor Davis.

The reader was horrified. The reader was intrigued. The reader was disgusted. The reader was drawn. The funnel cloud of energy subsided into itself. The reader followed the trajectory of the beads and the (semen) teardrop shapes, ignoring Viktor

Davis' words. In the frictionless medium of the void, their progress was uniform and ballet-like, as several beaded strands tumbled and turned and . . .

One segment of beads slowed, stopped and then followed a gentle curve at a right angle to the other strands, dropping several degrees out of its natural arc, contravening the Laws of Motion. Or did it? The reader had a *sense* that it had been acted on by an outside force, seized by something in the eternal night. It fell more swiftly, inscribed a tight circle, compressed in on itself. Just as it vanished, there had appeared a radiant pin-point of illumination: briefly — *very* briefly. It *was* there. And then it was gone. It was a . . . a . . .

'A wink,' said Viktor Davis.

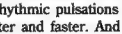
'And that,' he added, 'as is so often the case, is where the trouble began.'

Viktor Davis did not elaborate and the reader was relieved. It had seemed to the reader (as reader, author and story had drawn closer together) that Viktor Davis had become something of an impediment. Perhaps that wasn't the right word. An irritant perhaps: interposing a thinly fictionalized self between the reader and the story. The Big Round Glowing White Strange Thing was interesting, fascinating. Beside him (it), Viktor Davis seemed an intrusive carnival barker: a ringmaster stinking of cheap liquor or an inept interviewer. The reader was watching the surface of the thing as the energy and the storm of activity began to build once more, whirling and heaving. The cyclone column of energy rose, curving up and away from the surface, rhythmic pulsations along its length rising faster and faster. And then subsiding. Then quickening again.

'Come *on*,' said the reader. '*Do* it.'

The reader decided to forgo any further exhortation, as the sound of Viktor Davis' chuckling rumbled through the intercom.

At last it ca — issued forth. Expelled radiance arced once more across the darkness, tumbling, hurtling. Disappointedly, the reader watched as the radiance continued into the distance, unobstructed, dissipating, growing smaller, until it was lost from view.



Twice more the ritual repeated itself with no effect. The reader said nothing, simply eyeing the intercom as one might an incontinent pet in the vicinity of an expensive carpet.

Tension began to creep into the reader's shoulders and neck as a considerable length of time passed. The reader was still engaged by the spectacle of the thing, but now all — *all* — seemed but preamble. He was no longer an end in and of himself — the *thing* that was. It. Now he — *it* — was a means to a larger issue of some kind. When the storm upon its surface began a third time, the reader almost missed it. It was less chaotic, almost purposeful. The column of energy that rose from the surface was wider at the base than it had been previously. He seemed to diminish in size in inverse proportion (. . . it, that is: the thing . . .) to the greater width and height of the rising cyclone. It stretched forward and out, forming a straight line between the thing and the location of the (wink) former burst of radiance. The radiant matter was expelled, this time in more copious quantities.

'He shoots,' shouted Viktor Davis across the intercom.

The reader's palms were damp and trembling. One leg vibrated unconsciously. The reader's eyes widened as a thick strand was pulled from its trajectory, down and away, deflected by some inexplicable gravitational force. It whirled round and round, spiralling into a circle of darkness-within-the-darkness, until it seemed to coalesce, disappearing over some event horizon. A brilliant radiance snapped into being. And then disappeared.

'He *scoores*!' shouted Viktor Davis.

Hers was an act of imitation, at essence. Gathering debris, excretions, holding them immobile, in stasis in that Heart of Darkness. Pressure. Compression. Confinement. Containment. The wink of radiance had been caused by a combination of gravitation, friction and acceleration. But a spark was not a flame. A flame was a different trick entirely.

Thump. Thump.

The reader's attentions were aroused by the auditory *non sequitur*. What was that?

'Artistic license,' said Viktor Davis. 'The pounding of the metaphorical female fist into

the pocket of the metaphorical female catcher's mitt. That is to say: The Greater Void, the Mother of All Black Holes — having won the metaphorical toss — has elected to receive.

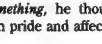
Right here, baby, she murmurs seductively. Right here.

The Void, needless to say, has done this before.

More debris, more excretions are captured. Pressure. Compression. Confinement. Containment. In time, the wink is replaced with a steady radiance formed by the continuous imploding and exploding of the compressed debris.

For his part, he was charmed. She was so tiny. So perfect. Of course, her radiance *said* nothing. No images swam on her surface. She told no story, expressed nothing. Though she was not sublime, she was . . . endearing, perhaps. Attractive in her own way. It required no leap of insurmountable faith, no complicated rationalisation to arrive at the opinion that her sheer . . . simplicity? her very lack of . . . complexity? was, in and of itself, a profound and important expression of . . . of . . . *some*thing. He couldn't quite put it into words, but he was (of a certainty) wholly and completely convinced that it was . . . beyond a shadow of a doubt . . . *some*thing.

My little something, he thought to himself, beaming with pride and affection.



Not alone. He was quite dizzy with joy at this newfound state of *Not alone-ness.* While she agreed, yes, *Not alone-ness* was a very good thing and, yes, it was a big part of what she felt herself, she felt that there was a more . . . appropriate . . . term. *Togetherness,* she suggested. Merely giving voice to the word made her gleam more brightly than before against the backdrop of the stygian firmament. *Togetherness,* he mused, trying the word on as if it were a sports jacket. If the sleeves were a trifle long (which they were), the stitching irregular and coarse (which it was), the cut of the garment itself lopsided and asymmetrical (decidedly), this was more than outweighed by the fact that she now gleamed *very* brightly, indeed. *Togetherness,* he concurred, vivid, joyful imagery swimming across his radiant countenance. Whatever makes *her* happy, he noted to himself, makes *me* happy.

Togetherness, they said in unison. And then they laughed with the sheer . . . *Togetherness* . . . of it all.

His happiness stretched before him, a boundless thing, infinite, radiant. *Togetherness,* he would cry, discharging a prodigious shower of debris (his aim was improving, he observed; he almost never missed now).

Alas, *her* happiness was somewhat . . . short-lived.

Togetherness, she would reply. Only now — now, the word itself seemed to hang in the void between them, pregnant with a discordant note of . . . well, of *what* he wasn't really sure. *Some*thing. *Some*thing in the way His Little Something said *Togetherness* just wasn't . . . quite . . . right. He confronted her with his observation, seeking clarification.

She demurred. She didn't know what he was talking about. *Togetherness,* she said (duplicating that singular discordant note with the virtuoso precision of an accomplished violinist).

As the reader knows already (or *should,* anyway), this archetypal exchange is an intricate dance which plays itself out in prescribed choreographic patterns. In the interest of brevity, we will 'fast forward' through the majority of the tedious do-si-do to the point where, finally, inevitably, at long (and virtually interminable) last, he 'corners' her and — *very* much against her ostensible will, *only* because he is so insistent, *simply* because she so *values* their . . . *Togetherness* — she grudgingly, hesitatingly, haltingly, unwillingly allows that, yes, it is True.

There is Something Wrong.

I *knew* it, he gasps (the thought crests upon whitecaps of anxiety hurled upwards from deep waves of self-admiration at the keenness of his insight).

It's *me,* isn't it? he asks. She reassures him (radiantly). No, no. It wasn't . . . *him,* exactly. *You?* he asks, deep furrows etching themselves within his imagery. Well, no. It's not . . . me, *exactly,* either, she replies.

Then *What* . . . he queries (his gaze sweeping, in meaningful counterpoint, across the virtually infinite reaches of the black void surrounding them) *Exactly.* Is. It?

(In this archetypal intercourse he had great advantage over his numberless successors in the severely limited range of likely suspects.)

Togetherness, she said (striking the identical dissonant note with the careless confidence of a concert hall pianist), is wonderful. She didn't want him to . . . misunderstand. His columns of energy were as magnificent as ever, rising proudly towards her. Very large. Very impressive. Her admiration for his columns was rather much, you know, boundless. And his radiant excretions (his Lovely little Gifts, as she called them) were very much appreciated. *Very* much appreciated, indeed. They were . . .

Sweet.

But . . .

But? he prompted

She struggled to find the right words. She just . . . felt, she had been wondering, she had this, you know, *feeling* . . . that they might just, maybe, possibly . . .

What? he queried, endeavouring (unsuccessfully) to keep any note of exasperation from intruding upon his question.

I just feel, she remarked offhandedly, that we could be, you know . . .

Closer.

The magnificent imagery yet swam upon his surface. If it was a trifle . . . murky (let us say), less . . . sharply defined, it was no less sublime for all of that. To be fair, his attentions were elsewhere now. He had become obsessed with the problem at hand. Since he was *here* and she was *there* . . . and there seemed no plausible means for relocating one or the other of them . . . there was only one remaining possibility: a link of some kind, a bridge, something which would connect them. Now he expressed himself (no longer) in mere pictures and shapes, he was concerned (no longer) with mere playful displays and expressions which existed and were created for their own sake. Now he had a Genuine Task, a Purpose — a *Real* Job (if you will). He became architect and engineer, planner and designer, construction worker and supervisor.

Whatever makes *her* happy, he reminded himself, makes *me* happy. If he noticed that on this occasion there was a different inflection to the words than there had been previously, he gave no sign as he set to work.

And her?

Well, she just gleamed, didn't she?

Of course, the only materials at hand were those that he produced from within himself. At first, he merely attempted to excrete his radiances as before, thinking that he could target them to fill the intervening gap and that they might, over time, hook up together and form the basis for a connection which could be made more permanent in their limitless shared future. The problem, of course, was that any strand or fragment of radiance arriving in her proximity quickly vanished into her without a trace, never to be seen again (something about *that* caused a glimmer of foreboding to sparkle within him; he attributed this to the natural stresses of starting a new job). With a little practice he was able to find the outer perimeter of her gravitational pull and in fairly short order had constructed a radiance extension from himself to the very edge of that voracious field.

Well, *part* of me is closer to you, he asserted hopefully.

Her radiance gleamed significantly less at this riposte.

No, huh? he asked, rhetorically.

Back to the drawing board, he concluded.

'It's the information superhighway without the information.'

anon. *David Letterman* staff writer

Gerhard reads the last of the unfinished manuscript and shuffles the typewritten pages into an orderly pile.

'Fun with Black Holes, eh?' he asks.

'Not me,' replies Viktor Davis.

Diplomatically he adds, 'Millions swear by them, though.'

And so, this is the end — the terminus of Viktor Davis' *Reads* radiance extension extension — as we leave the Big Round Glowing White Strange Thing to ponder his task. We are at the precipice of a partly completed bridge or archway. Not far away at all, the other half of that bridge, that archway, looms before us. The air is still and it is nighttime. It is time to construct that which will serve as a (temporary? permanent?) connection. Whether it constitutes a story within a story within a story within a story or remains a series of disconnected fragments depends entirely

upon your reaction to it. We step into the darkness.

Suddenly transatlantic voices are heard.

The voices are those of Viktor Davis and Alan Moore. They are locked in earnest conversation which takes the form of alternating monologues that are disjointed, fragmentary. They digress, they back and fill with words which alternate between the metaphorical and the empirically real (though both would likely favour 'real' as an alternative). Alan has recently finished reading issue 182 and there is much to catch up on since their last extended conversation, which had been documented therein. Apropos nothing (ostensibly, anyway, for such is the nature of their exchange), Viktor Davis 'lets fly' with one that he has been saving for just such an occasion:

'As real as today's headlines.'

Alan Moore's basso profundo laughter cascades over the phone line.

And now the reader is looking at the page of typesetting the reader is looking at. The reader reads these words. And now the reader reads *these* words. Just below the reader's line of sight a decorative flourish appears.

'Life out of balance,' Viktor Davis says, speaking to the reader from beneath the aforementioned flourish. 'It's a kind of cautionary zen sound-bite. The thing of it is — to me anyway — it doesn't just apply to individuals. It applies to governments, it applies to corporations, it applies to groups of all kinds. Life out of balance.' Another decorative flourish appears.

And now? Now, we are at the precise geometric midpoint between the two incomplete halves of the incomplete bridge, the incomplete archway. Here we encounter, suspended like holographic images in the intervening darkness, a small boy and a small girl. They are hunched over a piece of chocolate cake. One of them holds a knife. *This* one's task is to divide the cake into two pieces of equal size. When the task is completed, the *other* gets to choose one of the two pieces of cake.

The surgical precision brought to bear upon this operation by the one with the knife would put to shame the efforts of a world-class neurosurgeon.

And now? Now we are stepping away from explication, passivity. We are abandoning allegories, images and reminiscences. We're going to slip into something a little more . . . philosophical.

Viktor Davis asks the reader a question.

What do you think of a woman sleeping with a potential boss to get a job? What do you think of that decision/action?

There is a wrenching sensation and the reader divides into two separate awarenesses: male reader and female reader. They regard one another warily. The male reader says (wisely, instinctively, without thinking), Ladies first.

As if possessed by demons, as if seized by radiant divinity, a babble of voices erupts from the female reader.

It depends on her situation . . . has, you know, kids to support or something . . . husband left her . . . insecurity and low self-esteem from having been oppressed by the patriarchal . . . good at the job but no one will give her a chance because she's a . . . get off welfare . . . her only chance to . . . freedom of choice . . .

No, Viktor Davis says, interrupting. His eyes are locked onto those of the male reader. Pay attention, he seems to be saying. This is important.

I'm not talking about the individual woman. I'm talking about the act itself. Is it an Act of Bad Faith? Is it Wrong? Is it a Bad Thing To Do?

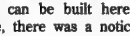
. . . well, of course, I certainly wouldn't . . . it will certainly or maybe . . . it might cause or people might see it cause . . . repercussions to everything, aren't there? . . . have a wife and kids? To me, that's . . . really respects and admires him and loves him . . . thinks she loves him . . . thinks she thinks she loves him . . . advise her not to, personally; I mean, those kinds of things always . . . good thing, can't it? What if she . . . it gets around the office and she gets a reputation as . . .

No, said Viktor Davis patiently. Let's try it in the form of a mathematical equation. 'Sexual Harassment Equals A Bad Thing To Do. Therefore, Sleeping With The Boss To Get A Job Equals . . .?'

. . . might have been molested when she was younger, so her response to an authority figure

. . . or a man sleeping with a female boss to get a job. No one would say . . . or a lesbian, if the boss were a female and a lesbian . . .

This, said Viktor Davis, sweeping his arm in a wide half-circle, is the ravine. No bridge, no part of a bridge, can be built here. Nothing can be built here. As he lit his cigarette, there was a noticeable tremor in his hand.



He exhaled a cloud of smoke.

Here, he said, looking suddenly drawn, suddenly tired, suddenly old beyond his years:

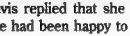
Here there be monsters.

Alan Moore's ex-wife and his ex-wife's girlfriend.

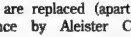
This was back in the days when Viktor Davis (or any male, for that matter) dared not say *anything* out loud in front of Those Sorts of Women. They were out for dinner. Viktor, Alan, Gerhard, Alan's then-wife and Alan's then-wife's girlfriend. The subject of movies came up and (with it) Scorcese's *Last Temptation of Christ*. It had been on 'telly' the week before. Alan had had no interest in seeing it. The Two Women had seen it, though, and waxed eloquent on the subject. What a terrible film! The women were all in subservient roles! Both Marys were portrayed as wimps! All of the disciples were men! The women were just there to do the cooking and the cleaning! Bloody over-glorified servants! (Viktor Davis sits, vibrating with internal rage, chewing his tongue.) Why wasn't there a decent film made about Christ's mother? That's what they wanted to know. 'What are you to me, woman?' he says to her — His Own Mother! And what was the big deal about Christ anyway? Didn't . . .

'To me,' Viktor Davis said, endeavouring to keep his tone as level as possible, 'that was the whole *point* of the film. Women represent temptation. Women tempt men away from more valuable pursuits into domesticity. The 'angel' who took Christ down from the cross led him into a happy family existence as an ordinary man. Later, when his wife dies, the 'angel' says, Pick another one. It doesn't matter. They're all the same woman with different faces.'

This, of course, brought dessert-and-coffee time to a crashing, sub-zero halt. Viktor Davis dropped the subject in the face of the self-evident impasse. There was nothing left to say on either side. As Alan's wife's girlfriend drove them all back to the house, the car achieved top speeds of between eighty-five and a hundred kilometers per hour. Viktor Davis remembers having two distinct thoughts. One: driving at reckless speeds along narrow English streets in no way refuted the argument he had put forward in the restaurant. Two: if this was Viktor Davis' time to die, he could think of no better way to go than wedged into the back seat of a compact car with Gerhard and Alan Moore, listening with rapt attention as Alan held forth at great, eloquent and insightful length on the subject of the Court of Louis XIV.

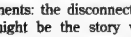


Back at the house, over tea and spliffs, Alan's wife asked Viktor Davis if she had remembered to thank him for all the help he had given the three of them in putting together *AARGH* (Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia), a benefit comic book. Viktor Davis replied that she had and reiterated that he had been happy to do it.



Viktor Davis had purchased a book on tarot cards for use in the 'montage' covers of issues 171, 172 and 173. It was published in England in 1973. The Magician and the High Priestess cards are replaced (apart from a token appearance by Aleister Crowley's Magician card) by The Juggler and the Lady Pope.

The same news day that brought word of the death of Jacqueline Onassis addressed itself to Princess Diana rescuing a male swimmer from drowning.



Now. Now we have reached the opposite side of the intervening chasm. Beneath our metaphorical feet is the mirror image of the incompleted (bridge, archway). Behind us now is the story within a story within a story within a story which might be only disconnected fragments: the disconnected fragments which might be the story within a story within a story within a story. Solidity (of a kind) has returned. For the reader who saw only fragments, there are only these words. And *these* words. For the other? A mirror-image reader, visible through the page, beyond the words, rises slowly like a

diver ascending from obscure depths; a convergence seems imminent. It is unclear which of these two, the former or the latter, represents 'exception' and which represents 'consensus'.

Viktor Davis stands adjacent to the reader. The two of them are now without context, without setting. The Luke Skywalker orbiter is gone. There is only the Void, the Big Round Glowing White Strange Thing and his tiny, radiant companion at a great remove. It appears that there might (or might not) be something between them. The something is (or is not) nebulous, vague, imprecise.

'A decision has been made; a compromise has been struck,' says Viktor Davis. 'Something will be lost and there is hope that something will be gained. The decision and the compromise are incomplete halves of a larger idea. Between decision and compromise a thing grows for which there are no words.'

He has spoken slowly, as if in a trance. He is quiet for a time and when he speaks again his tone is more conversational.

'I'm staying here. You'll move to a point halfway between myself and them. You'll be able to see exactly what happens from there. When it's time, I'll pull you back.'

The reader starts to say something and then stops. Viktor Davis begins to shrink (or perhaps the reader begins to grow: *all stories are true*). A moment later the author is a mere speck, scarcely visible against the velvet blackness. And then the author is gone.

The reader turns.

The Big Round Glowing White Strange Thing was (relatively speaking) now smaller and the tiny companion was (relatively speaking) no longer tiny. Between them, a radiant column of fire, evocative images swimming through and around it, stretched across the intervening void, quickening towards her.

It was like an hourglass (*our glass*)

It was like a waterfall (*watch her fall*)

It was an anteater's proboscis stretching, stretching through the darkness, brilliant flashes of light leaping from the tapered end towards her. The event horizon of her gravitational field was now a fiery crescent of gleaming incandescence. As the column of radiance inched ever closer, she began to swell more rapidly, as if she sought to merge with the white hot parabola crawling about her circumference. The reader glanced at him and saw the decision, the compromise. He grew smaller, the imagery on his surface was fading, replaced by a simple and uniform radiance which mirrored her own. The reader glanced from one to the other, scarcely daring to breathe. The base of the column was solid; along its length waves of energy pulsated and swam, hurtling towards her. Soon (*very* soon) they would be the same size. The column accelerated cautiously. It *was* long enough. It *was* solid enough.

This is going to work, thought the reader. This is really . . . going . . . to . . .

Something wrenched the reader backwards away from the event even as it reached a climax. The image of the immaculate twin suns receded swiftly from the reader. It made no difference, thought the reader. The die was cast. Any second now the connection would be made. Any second now.

Simultaneously the reader saw: the column of fire snap taut, the fiery event horizon seeking to connect with itself (on her opposite side) into a perfect ring, some essence of his (its) being wrenched through the umbilical connection.

The column became whippet-thin, wrenching itself from side to side (she was growing larger and he was growing smaller), whip-sawing wildly, the frantic motion of an animal with its (his) leg caught in a trap.

Something's got to give, thought the reader.

An explosion of white-hot radiance filled the void.

That final image had burned itself into the reader's consciousness. There was something so familiar about it. The frantic, skipping-rope quality of the impossibly thin column: the distended teardrop shape he had assumed in the paroxysm of his death throes. He had looked just like . . . just like a . . . a . . .

'A spermatozoa,' said Viktor Davis.

The reader blinked several times. A spermatozoa. Yes. That's exactly what he had looked like.

'As stated previously, there is a vast amount of blank canvas for her to work with,' said Viktor Davis. 'The Void has done this before many, many times: many, many different places. Each time, each place, was a learning

experience, an experiment. Because she had, as her goal, Merged Permanence, each of the experiments was a failure. Merged Permanence. She was as certain of the intrinsic *rightness* of her ambition as she was that (once he had adjusted himself to it, once he had given himself over to it entirely and completely, once he gave it a chance) he would feel the same way.

Separateness, Not Alone-ness, she was fond of saying, *Doesn't Feed the Bulldog.*

Through the miracle of Cerebus Technology, it was possible for Viktor Davis and the reader to take a closer look at some of her more commendable attempts.

'Of course, I'm assuming here that you think Merged Permanence is commendable.' Viktor Davis regarded his reader with transparent bemusement. His expression reflected his belief that the assumption was so universal in its nature that any qualification of it was, for all intents and purposes, unnecessary.

Fuck off, Viktor, thought the reader, but said nothing.

'You say you want a revolution?
Well, you know . . .
We'd all love to see the plan.'

John Lennon
'Revolution'

Centrifugal metamorphosis. Ring around a rosey. Orbit. Revolution. It was one of the first of her significant innovations. It required patience, of course — waiting until the two of them were of comparable or nearly comparable size.

The reader could see the two begin to pirouette, circling one another.

Gradually, subtly, she began to make her orbit slightly elliptical (a little gravitational compression here, a little condensing of the void there), slightly out of the horizontal plane, so that they began to move in perfect tandem through space and through time. Swing your partner. The effect of this is easier to see (the two shrank, from the reader's viewpoint, to infinitesimal size) from a distance and with the aid of a little Cerebus Technology Time-Lapse Photography (repeated images of the two climbed in an interlocking spiral).

The Double Helix.

The Arm Game:

The Double Helix pursued its course across the void. Suddenly, one of the repeating images began to wobble — to vary its orbit.

She really didn't know (bat bat) what was . . . wrong. Her orbit just seemed to be (bat bat) decomposing. She felt . . . strange . . . dizzy . . . she thought she might . . . oooooo . . .

The Elbow Game:

Very close proximity. *Very* close proximity. There was the wrenching sense of something within him, something vital, slipping away and disappearing into her. After a moment or so, their mutual orbit resumed, but they were very much closer together now: a fact which did not escape his notice.

'The next time,' he thought to himself, 'she tries that Fainting Shit, I'm going to be ready.'

The Wrist Game:

Coming out on the other side, he endeavours to pull as far away as possible, to break free entirely if possible. He turns into a Thumb. She, of course, divides into four fingers (Ms. Get Back Give Him Space, Ms. Stay With Him Stay With Him and — between *them* — Ms. Not That Far Away and Ms. Not That Close).

Bang.

The Leg Game wasn't altogether different from the Arm Game. Until the Wrist (in this case Ankle) thing. He almost breaks free: first on one side and then the other, but all four of them hold on tight (they were ready for him this time). The result? A Big. Toe and Four Little Toes.

'The Thumb was more interesting,' grouses the Littlest Toe. 'Oh, shut up,' snarl her Three Sisters.

Bang.

Then there was the Four Way Void Containment Game, distending him almost (*almost*) to the breaking point. Distending and Releasing Him, Distending Him and Releasing Him. One, two, three, four, AGAIN! One, two, three, four, AGAIN! One, two, three, four, AGAIN! . . .

See, hon? she cooed. We're making beautiful music together.

LUB-dub LUB-dub LUB-dub

The Heart Game.

She just *Adored* the Heart Game.

LUB-dub LUB-dub LUB-dub

See? she says, translating for the reader. He says, 'Me too, my darling one.'

LUB-dub LUB-dub LUB-dub

Permanence. Merged Permanence. Wasn't it grand?

LUB-dub LUB-dub LUB-dub, he said.

See? I *told* you you'd like it if you gave it a *chance*!

LUB-dub LUB-dub LUB-dub

Sadly for him, no Bang.

'A silicon chip inside her head
gets switched to overload'

Boomtown Rats
'I Don't Like Mondays'

The Juggler Game. What is it that he likes? What is it that he dislikes? It was an easy matter to draw away his energy to different areas of compression. That was the first one that I showed you: the 'retreating known universe'. It could just be two of them: Her and The Other Woman. It could be three, four, a dozen, a hundred. They introduce colour into a black and white situation: alternately heating up and cooling off. Which colour did he choose to 'feed'? Which colour was he attracted to? Yellow? White? Green? Blue? A mix of them? They 'put their faces on' (as it were). Do you think this colour makes me look fat? It begins, of course, as a pure research project. It evolves into a friendly competition. After a time, the friendly competition becomes a good deal less friendly. The one he feeds turns a brilliant golden. The one he doesn't feed fades to black.

Jackie and Marilyn. Betty and Veronica.

Bang.

'He blew his mind out in a car
He didn't notice that the lights had changed'

John Lennon
'A Day in the Life'

Speaking Viktor Microbe Davis to *Cerebus* Microbe Reader (here in this tiny corner of a tiny corner of a bomb crater trillions of years after the Big Bang — *Our* Big Bang), there was more than a little artistic license in showing you the swollen red globe being devoured by different-coloured spheres. I'd have to say that ours was not a Juggler Game Big Bang. Ours was a little different.

If he can contain himself (and that is a Big If, to be sure: from Zeus on down, he has — far more often than not — been an indiscriminately Randy Old Bastard). If he *can* contain himself, there is always the remote chance of the Brain, Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat Game. He divides into two entities: Left Brain and Right Brain, being extremely careful to maintain a solid connection between the two against the relentless and mysterious gravitational pull at work upon them. They talk it over between them: Just What the Hell Are Those Things? Each extrudes a small Globular Scout at the end of a Communication Line to Have a Closer Look and Report Back. Two Small Ones Just Below Us, Sir, and Two Slightly Larger Ones On Our Flanks. Far Below That, There's A Fucking Huge One: A Stomach of Some Kind At The End of a Long Tube. Word comes down from the Joint Left Brain/Right Brain High Command. Snot and Spit Only, No More Ejaculating At or Near the Vicinity of Those Things.

She hates the Brain, Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat Game.

She just HATES it.

After the Big Bang . . . after *any* Big Bang . . . there is a great deal of debris created: solid, liquid and gas. It is one of the primary conceits of the Void that, if you repeat and compound a mistake often enough and long enough, it becomes a miracle. Her rhetorical point being: if you endlessly contain, confine, crush and compress debris until it explodes and then take *that* debris and contain, confine, crush and compress it, spreading his Seminal Energy over a wider and wider area, you end up with something. As with most female ldgic this is accurate as far as it goes. It goes from here to there. And then it's time to talk about something else.

Yes, dear. Whatever you say, dear.

The White City of Her Offspring (asserts Viktor Davis, not being much of a one for 'time to talk about something else' when there's the smell of blood in the air) is what you end up with. Imperfect replicas of imperfect replicas of imperfect replicas. It is for this reason that she is not terribly fond of planets and even less fond of moons. Next to a star, a planet is really rather a poor thing, being little more than a chunk of rock or a big bag of gas. A moon is a poor excuse for a planet. The allegory this represents of

those long-ago heady days when Not Aloneness became Togetherness is not lost on her. All matter contains equal (or unequal) measures of the Void, the Seminal Energy and debris. It is Merged Permanence of a kind: mute, ubiquitous and largely unthinking. To the devotees of Merged Permanence (however temporary it proves to be), no sacrifice is too great. The End justifies Any Means. *Any* means.

Our Big Bang was the Mouth Game.

The Arm Game and the Leg Game were practice runs. When it became apparent that he intended to make a break for freedom, there was a certain . . . hardness . . . that was required on her part. A kind of Tough Love, if you will. Fingernails and toenails. When a hug just won't do the trick, you need a weapon of some kind. It is . . . after all . . .

For His Own Good.

Our Big Bang was a sophisticated one.

Yin and Yang.

As Above, So Below.

You Do Me and I'll Do You.

Sixty-nine.

Mouth and Tongue. Tongue and Mouth.

Or, as she so eloquently put it:

I Want You Inside Me.

His mistake was in thinking that she meant Temporarily.

Her mistake was in thinking that if two snakes eat each other's tails far enough, they will become a single snake eating its tail. Merged Permanence. They did merge. They formed a circle. She was very much smaller than him (VERY much smaller). This time she extruded something from her surface and he was the one who imitated her. As above, so below. It required great care, a great deal of lubrication, a great length of time, but they did move, one inside the other. Her tongue in his mouth, His tongue in her mouth. In and then out, out and then in. Deep then Shallow, Shallow then Deep. Deeper and then Not So Deep, Not So Deep and then Deeper. Deepest and then Deeper, Deeper and then Deepest. Of course, after Deepest, she wasn't as content with Deeper. After Deeper she had no interest in going back to Not So Deep. After Not So Deep, Deep just didn't make the grade anymore. As for Shallow:

Where Do You Think *You're* Going?

The Mouth and Tongue Game was a lot of fun, he thought. He was pretty sure he'd like to try the Mouth and Tongue Game again real soon. He wanted to thank her for showing it to him, but now . . .

But she wasn't done yet. She wasn't done by a long shot.

That's when the Mouth and Tongue Game became the Mouth, Tongue and Teeth Game. And that's when it stopped being a Game.

Relax, she said. What are you so Afraid of?

Let go, he said. I Mean It.

You Aren't Going Anywhere, she said.

Wanna Bet? he said.

Try me, she said.

It is uncertain who used their teeth first. It is pretty clear that she got a good grip on the tip of him and that if he tried to pull out all the way, he was going to lose a good chunk of himself in doing so. Hers, of course, was a lot smaller. And his teeth, naturally enough, were a lot bigger. And she wasn't trying to pull away. On the contrary, hers was as deep in his mouth as she could get it.

He got all of it on the first try.

He swallowed it.

It came to be known, thereafter, as an Adam's apple.

Bang.

It was a failed experiment, but it was a pretty close balance. Can two snakes eating each other's tails become one snake? Is the resulting snake a snake or is it something else entirely? What would a being that was half mouth and half tongue look like? Would you let your daughter marry one?

Interesting questions.

Blood and Semen.

As Alice Cooper so eloquently put it, 'Only Women Bleed.'

Semen and Blood.

Red and white. White and red.

We are our corpuscles.

We are approaching headlights.

You are retreating taillights.

We are different, fundamentally, irrevocably.

We are as different

As Night and Day.

On this blue and white spinning ball we are (so far as we know) unique. Life is born, life devours or is devoured by other life, life procreates, life dies. Where life merges, there is painful, agonizing death on one side and a filling, gorging life sustainment on the other. Where life merges temporarily, there is pleasure, exhilaration, closeness and climax.

We are the Upright Ones, columns rising against relentless gravitational force. It is our thinking, our reasoning which sets us apart. There is no such thing as Thinking Violence. Violence, by its nature, is Unthinking. Violence is Emotional (in a word). Emotion is Void Residue, the Emptiness between our molecules which is as One with the Eternal Night.

Void unites with Void. A shared emptiness is declared fullness. Big things consume little things.

The reader and Viktor Davis are sitting side-by-side on a small sofa in the lobby of a large and opulently furnished hotel. It is nighttime and, apart from the distant whir of a vacuum cleaner dislodging bits and fragments of debris, absorbing and containing them, all is quiet. There is a sound of approaching footsteps on the black-and-white checkered marble floor.

'Mr. Davis?'

'Yes.'

'Your driver phoned to say that he's had a little car trouble. He won't be here for another hour or so.'

'All right.'

'If you'd like, sir, I could arrange for a different car with another company.'

'No. By the time they woke up a driver and got over here, it would probably be another hour, anyway, wouldn't it?'

'Yes, sir, I suppose it would.'

'It's all right.' Viktor Davis glanced at the reader. 'We've got a few more things to talk about.'

'Yes, sir.'

The concierge turned and was gone.

Viktor Davis lit a cigarette.

'Just one more,' he said. The reader looked doubtful.

'No, no. Not the cigarette,' Viktor laughed. 'I meant one more visit. Issue 186.'

'And then,' he added, 'we go our separate ways.'

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dave,

I'm sick of being a teenager.

Why should all teenage relationships be ridiculous two-week-long flirtations?

Why are the only type of guys girls like such assholes?

Why are all girls such stupid pieces of fluff?

Why do they all still want to be friends?

Why do they all act like you didn't mean a thing to them?

I'm sick of all this bullshit!

Sincerely,

Jake

P.S. Oh, ya, I almost forgot: I love *Cerebus* and all of that crap!

I'm assuming those were all rhetorical questions.

★★★★★★★★★★

Hey Dave,

I always open the letters page with some trepidation. It seems to divide DAVE, the brilliant auteur/storyteller from DAVE, the guy who'll spout opinions on any given subject. Well, it is a public forum.

So, the AIDS story doesn't wash with you? (AIDS is just one story? Here, and I thought it was a tapestry of human suffering, political injustice and occasional inspiration. Must be me.) I don't understand your logic one bit. Are we now basing our views of life on how-does-it-affect-the-ultra-famous? Who cares? Maybe Rock Hudson's lover is sick and doesn't care to tell us. Maybe they practiced safe sex, or no sex, as they knew Rock was sick and dying, probably for years. Maybe it's none of our business. Mostly, with the exception of Magic, celebrities have hidden their illness until the later stages because of the stigma. Magic Johnson has had to endure negative press, rumors and forced retirement from basketball. Why on Earth should they bother? By the way, I'd bet that Arthur Ashe, Anthony Perkins, Michel Foucault, Robert Reed and possibly Miles Davis would be pretty peeved at being left off your list.

You really lose me with the "Commist/Kevillist agenda". AIDS is a feminist agenda? After wondering why feminists would want ten million Africans dead (80% of them heterosexual, thank you very much), I realized you must mean that either a) feminists do not want any of us to enjoy sex, or b) feminists do not want men to enjoy sex because they're all heartless, sex-crazed cads who could care less what fatal disease they're spreading. Aside from debating the merits of these arguments, I wonder what the Hell feminists have to do with AIDS in the first place? At what point in the history of the disease have feminists had any definitional power? In America, the gay community (the sex-crazed cads doing the fucking) brought the fight to the public, and they've pretty much carried the ball ever since.

You're right about one thing, Dave; AIDS is hard to catch. You CAN fuck like a rabbit and not catch AIDS — or you can fuck once and get it. You seem to imply that AIDS is not sexually transmittable, then talk about a groupie who got it by fucking the Montreal Canadiens. Some die in ten years, some die in one, but we shouldn't relax our guard because "David Bowie looks pretty healthy."

I wouldn't get so upset at you, Dave, except I know you have a certain influence. Don't listen to him, folks! Protect yourselves! AIDS is a crapshoot; why take the chance?

God, I hope your margins are better than mine.

Allen Rubinstein
10645 Valley Spring Lane, #7
N. Hollywood, CA
USA 91602

AIDS is a story. As constituted, it is not delivering on the ending promised. I'd like to thank long-time *Cerebus* fan Brian Doherty, Managing Editor of *Regulation* magazine for sending along his review of Robert Root-Bernstein's *Rethinking AIDS: The Tragic Cost of Premature Consensus.* Efforts are being made in the scientific community to write a story which suits the facts of the AIDS virus, but of course all of the research money is going into HIV which means we are a good decade or so away from any possibility of a plausible explanation. Too much Emotion (like your letter, Allen) and not enough Thought.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I recently got a full-time temporary job which pays to me what seems an astronomical salary ($9.00/hour) and I attribute my success to the deceased Richard Nixon.

My opinions regarding the man are as mixed as anyone's. He was a distinguished statesman and civil rights advocate. He was also deeply insecure. He did not believe in himself (or at least not in his charisma/appeal). It struck me that the reason he stooped to negative campaigning, red-baiting and Watergate was his insecurity. This lack of charisma became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

One day I lay in bed, musing how little my contribution to society was. This wallowing in self-doubt I realized was what allowed Nixon to become the man he was and which would take me if I allowed myself to join him in his wallowing. The revelation jolted me and I immediately took to job-hunting with a renewed fervor. Within days I had this job and am contributing to the company and making money as well. (False starts and lack of determination riddled my earlier hunting).

My point is that even things which seem inevitable in our heads are not inevitable if we allow ourselves to turn ourselves around.

Thank you Nixon, wherever you are. Whatever your faults, you had a gladiator's heart, knowing truly that that which does not kill us makes us stronger. I will try and

emulate you in this. (And not in Watergate.)

Nos Morituri Salute,

David S. Auer

P.S. Isn't the signature cool? (It beats my lousy handwriting.)

Civil rights advocate? This *is* Dick Nixon we're talking about, isn't it?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

I find it strange that I feel compelled to write to you. I really can't fathom it, or else I know and am denying it to myself, or simply will not disclose it. I think the second option is the most likely, myself. And I just gave a small lecture on Cleopatra. Of course, she had no real troubles with denial.

I've been thinking about a throne room, that of Suenteus Po II. He was surrounded by his wizardly court of Illusionists, a group most likely at odds with the Church of Tarim. This group could offer Alfred no legitimacy, and probably may have drained it as a whole. They were not the Church, and legitimacy flows from the Church in such a state. Yet he kept them, and identified with them in ways he never did with the clergy. I find it interesting that there seems to be very little mysticism tied to the Church of Tarim, and very little philosophy, either. I often wonder if religion serves any purpose in Iest. I do know that you are of the school of thought that implies that spirituality and religion are separate and divorceable concepts. There was Archbishop Posey's vision, and he prayed a little. Cerebus appeared to pray for political expediency all of once, but I don't recall anyone praying, in any real sense. O, yes I do. Pud prayed once. Only him, amidst a cast of Popes and Papesses, none of whom ever pray. You write of an interesting religion, at least to me.

The Arab philosopher Ibn Bajja, sometimes known as Avempace, wrote of men such as himself in the *Governance of the Solitary*. I think Ibn Bajja would have made a splendid Illusionist. Ibn Bajja wrote that one must seek to live in a virtuous city, a place where every man is offered the highest excellence he is fit to pursue. All opinions in the virtuous and perfect city are true, and none are false. No one here focuses on opinions that are outside the consensus of opinion held in the city, since these opinions are erroneous. Interestingly, there are no jurists or doctors in the virtuous city.

In the imperfect city, however, the same holds true. Few people focus on opinion outside the consensus of the city. Yet, this consensus is erroneous by definition, since the city is an imperfect city. In such a city, dissenting opinions are possible. Ignoring those who are more erroneous than city itself, we may call those truthful ones who dissent "weeds." The imperfect city, if seen as a plant, is already diseased and weakened, as is witnessed by the presence of weeds. Weeds live their lives in a mental solitude, so as not to corrupt themselves, yet suck their nourishment and grow off the dying plant. As they grow, they destroy the plant, and become the plant. Perfection is achieved through subversion.

It's an interesting argument, certainly something that passes the time while smoking one's pipe (possibly filled with illicit substances) in the luxury of a salon, perhaps while playing chess. However, it seems to be little more than legitimation for the intellectual life of the salon. This perfect city is always represented as being far away from the Islamic Umma. In the perfect city, Ibn Bajja's competition no longer exists: the doctors and Islamic jurists are no longer necessary. He does not mention the role of the government in the perfect city. However, his constant reference to Plato's *Republic* can only lead me to infer that he favors the rule of philosopher-kings, and in Ibn Bajja's vision, these philosopher-kings are probably not monarchs who keep salons full of intellectuals for the purpose of dabbling. I often wondered what Ibn Bajja's patron, the illustrious Almoravid *Amir al-Muslimin*, thought of the ideas of his courtier. After all, he relied upon the jurists and their *shari'a* for legitimacy. He was technically subordinate to the Commander of the Faithful in Baghdad, and was supposed to at least be nominally a good Sunni.

Yet monarchs who are not legitimate in and of themselves, but rely upon a religious institution to legitimate them, tend to resent those religious institutions. This is why nationalism was so attractive to European monarchs, although it eventually did a good number of them in. The Commander of the Muslims probably enjoyed indulging in his salons, just to hear attacks made on those meddlesome jurists; attacks he would condemn if made outside the salon, but enjoyable enough inside it. Such a man can afford a few weeds sucking off his plant, or so he thought. Have you ever read Ibn Khaldun's *al-Muqadimma*? I think you would like it. A short while after Ibn Bajja's death, the Almoravids were swept off the map by the Almohads, a group who had an appreciation for philosophy, and an extreme distaste for Islamic jurists. Interestingly enough, they didn't last long, and the jurists are with us unto the present.

I wonder what your Illusionists think among themselves. Intellectuals are, as a rule, self-obsessed: witness the large number of historical and sociological works that they have been writing about themselves lately. What was Alfred's relationship with the Church? Illusionism seems more potent than philosophy as I know it. Of course, Ibn Rushd's (Averroës) philosophy became part of the Catholic faith, thanks to Saint Thomas Aquinas. This does not imply impotence. Philosophy was largely rejected in Islam, however, which does imply some flaccidness. It remained in the province of the elite, which of course is why intellectuals stay in the salon. Reality can be so harsh for a fragile ego. There is little joy in being ignored by the masses, if one is in total love with one's own thoughts. Elitism is a natural response. By elevating one's self above the masses, one turns their insult into their greatest compliment. Except for Marxism, of course; that did manage to escape the salons. Perhaps philosophy fails to reach the masses due to infirmity of purpose on the part of its lovers? Does Illusionism have a Lenin, I wonder?

As of late, there has been some debate in the interlocking series of salons that shape nothing but themselves about the true nature of your friend Suenteus Po. Is he a well-informed intellectual, impotent in his own salon? Is he a mover and shaker? Does anyone believe a word that he says? To me, he's a bottomless well of lies, like some interminable Chinese box. Does anyone truly penetrate to the center? I wonder

if he's Astoria's father. That would be poetic.

You once said somewhere that you didn't favor putting comics through the academic grinder Prior to this statement, I'd never heard analysis referred to as a maker of hamburger. In light of this analogy, perhaps you think of analysis as being female in nature? Forgive me, perhaps I've gone too far. Yet, I am male, and am fond of the tool of my trade. I had not previously viewed analysis in those uncomfortable terms.

I have wondered why you oppose analysis of comic books. Do you dislike academics and their views, or do you think that comic books don't have intellectual content? The latter seems a dubious proposition for you, sir. *Reads* strikes me as a curiosity in this regard. It seems to me to be of a very deconstructionist nature. While I am not among those who complain that it is an excuse for self-indulgence and self-publishing, it does seem to share something of the implosive feel of post-structural thought. Suenteus Po began criticizing himself, and ended by criticizing others. Is there a boundary between art and criticism? Most artists hate critics, and I can understand this. Yet, I don't see the boundary in this work. It is very implosive. Hmm. Don't think we didn't notice the similarity of the Judge's creation tale and Cerebus' journey to see Po.

I still have the same questions, above all. Taking into account your notoriously evil mind, could it be that this entire comic book is a Lord Julius style ruse, like that celebrated directory? Are these complex messages that we poor readers try to decipher really our own inventions that we read into your book simply as the result of a search for meaning, knowing . . . KNOWING . . . that there MUST be a meaning? After all, why create it, if there is no meaning? If that were the case, it would be a search which we initiate on the faulty assumption that no one does anything meaninglessly. That does seem to be the problem most of your characters have with Lord Julius. While there is no meaning behind his directory, there is motive. *Caveat emptor?* I still wonder. I still want to believe, though. I think I have good grounds for believing. This is probably a work of love, whatever your love may be. But still, how far can you implode before you explode?

Sincerely yours,

T.S. Hattar

6407 Springdale Road
Apt. #1204
Austin, Texas
USA 78723-3820

Well, that presupposes that I am imploding. *Cerebus* is a work of Thought, not Emotion. I'm just trying to show you how things look through my eyes. What you see is what *you* see. See?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

You have to get the "white rose" wet — like a dripping oyster shell — before you eat it! No wonder it tasted TERRIBLE! By-the-way, I need **THREE** more decks of *Diamondback*. Enclosed is a check. Please do the math. I trust. Thanks.

Unpretentiously,

Leinad of Hender
921 E. Dayton Circle
Ft. Lauderdale, FL
USA 33312

P.S. Fellow Aardvarkers,

Tell me true . . . When you read *Mind Game* issues, do you feel the calling of the moon or something etherial perhaps? Does it make you wander into the depths of yourself and leave the fact of gravity in a nutshell somewhere back *there* in the world of time and space? Well I certainly do. And I have discovered that Dave has experienced many-a-strangeness; for he has woven his great travels into the expression of this excellent little book called *Cerebus*. I am only guessing mind you; so please don't take drastic emotional offense at my speculations, but a little however, is acceptable.

I remember reading *Cerebus* #157 — a *Mind Game* issue. And I also learned that Dave and Ger were coming to town. Around this time, I experienced (as Cerebus did in *Mind Games*) the astral world; in addition, I comprehended the profound meaning of a song called *Astral Traveler* (a "Yes" song — *Time and a Word*). All this unveiled simultaneously! Who pulled those curtain ropes? Coincidence? Who knows . . . Dave? Doubt it. But it was one of those moments when reality dumped a truck-load of events into my lap, all of which, represented one another perfectly — symbolic of an alerted state of consciousness. Something new on the horizon of my knowing, hummm. *This needs to be discussed,* I thought. *Meeting Dave would certainly clear things up. I will ask him about this hypothesis of mine, and then, I shall KNOW whether or not Dave is working with (or in or within) this alternate reality.* So off to the Miami comic convention I went, with my 157 in hand.

A signature? . . . of course — it was to be the marking point at which Dave and I crossed paths. I was excited as all hell. But when I arrived at the convention, there was a surprise beyond my glorified expectations . . .

It was, fellow Aardvarkers, without a doubt, a rather pathetic sight indeed. Firstly, the convention was held in that wretched city, Miami. And secondly, when I got there, I saw Dave sitting behind a table with Ger on the side. Both looked unmistakably like SLAVES serving some form of penance to an enormous line of mindless money mongers mumbling about how they are going to sucker Dave & Ger into signing their entire collections of *Cerebus*. As I walked to the end of the line, they whispered: "I'll get him to sign this one; it's worth the most — or maybe this one, too . . . or three, or FOUR! God, my collection will be worth a lot. I might have to wait in line many times to get them all signed . . ." And so on, and so on, they babbled. I thundered in my mind: *Have they no consideration! — humph; like a dead fish . . . I bloat at thee!*

Apparently, the fair and gentle grey tissue encased within their thick skulls, sullied by the superficial powers of perpetual greed, lay dormant at the edge of tremendous enlightenment — DAVE SIM & GER! Too bad they cannot see the worlds beyond their wall of avarice. *Cerebus* is so much more than a comic book with capital value.

My single *Cerebus* paled in comparison to the mountains encumbering the arms of silly folks. I felt nude but superior. That's ok, isn't it?

Behind me came an incurable boy/man; he too, like many others, wielded a pile of *Cerebus*. I was cordial; however, while trying to talk to him about the *Mind Game* journeys, being that it was on my mind at the time, he pretended to understand with an occasional

meaningless verbal response: "Uh huh . . . ya," and "I see." If he wasn't using these layman terms, he would elude the astral subject by responding with a never-ending story about his comic book collection — its size and value, especially VALUE! Never once did he attempt delving into the subject at hand, no matter how hard I tried to connect, in which case, proving my initial thought: that he was — without a flake of doubt — an ignoramus, incurable, lost from the beginning. Phooey! I gave up. Obviously his mind is trapped deep, and firm, beneath his avarice wall.

He continued to yak. While he did so, the young fellow in front of me, tapped my shoulder and asked, "You're going to wait in this huge line just to have Dave sign one book?" Not wasting the effort to speak, I nodded my head *yes* and rolled my eyes; for he too, held a stack of *Cerebus*. I was surrounded! Help! Pathetic. Just bloody damn well pathetic. How . . . how does Dave manage his patience dealing with such foolishness? Anyway . . .

To separate myself from the line, I focused on my purpose: *What does Dave know? Will this meeting confirm my suspicions about Dave's experiences? Cerebus floating, drifting through the universe. Leinad floating, drifting through the universe. The moon, the sun, the stars; all within the touch of my shadow finger. But things are too loose — my body gone! Wait! I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that bring total obliteration . . .*" — Frank Herbert, I remembered, had/has such a way with truth. *Calm.*

Finally, I met Dave. (Do you remember? I wonder . . .)

"Just a simple signature would be cool; It will be like a marking poi--"

"Nah, I'll draw you a Cerebus." Dave cuts me short. "What's your name?"

"Dan." We shook hands, and Dave took my 157, pulled the trigger to his pen and immediately began drawing Cerebus on the first page. *Cool*, I thought. *But how do I ask my strange question?* My nerves began to still. *How am I going to say this?* Looking back at the line, I shook my head at the detestable sight of *Cerebus* stacks waiting to be rejected by Dave; I was mesmerized, and spoke nearly unconsciously as Dave drew. "It would seem to me, Dave, that . . . many of your ideas come from . . . a rather etherial place."

He looked up, still drawing, gave a grin and a few nods, and returned his face to the page. "Yes."

He knows! My god! I thought and asked, "Really . . . how often do you . . . do you visit this . . . *place*?"

"I live there." Dave seriously replied as our eyes met, punctuating the moment.

Incredible! This connection was much easier than I anticipated. Now my mind was wandering through a maelstorm of possibilities — thinking about the reality of my ventures, seeing them pass with vivid ripples of multiple colors, leaving me in a speechless trance. But I uttered something I cannot recall, and Dave replied:

"Well, at least you read the book." As he rolled his eyes at the line of money mongers behind me, I smiled and laughed knowingly. So did Dave.

We continued with some inside jokes as he finished the page; then he pushed his *Diamondbacks* on me (how could I resist; after all, *Diamondbacks* are the reason for this letter) and signed them too. Ger followed up with a signature on everything including a backdrop on Dave's artwork. Cool! My collection will be worth BILLIONS! hee hee hee

I hope that the secrets of this passage are revealed to pondering eyes. If anybody has truly ventured beyond the nutshell of time and space — and loves *Tales from the Topicgraphic Oceans, Relayer,* and standing so very *Close to the Edge* — and would like to share their experiences with me, use an envelope. That's what the address is for.

Hey, **Nicole Kolisch,** I cried tears of laughter reading your letter in 180. I know how you feel, that bubble bursting when the curtain rises; I'm an actor too — sometimes. But all that business about natural hair, does it mean you like men with beards?

Leinad

It's really no big deal. I mean, *someone* has to live there. As JFK said about the presidency, 'the money's good and I can walk to work.'

★★★★★★★★★★

. . . Victor Davis unfolds the sheet of 8-1/2 X 14 paper he has removed from the envelope. His eyes read:

The reader slid the black vinyl binder containing issues 5 through 25 of Cerebus [as well as a strip of Friends of Cerebus stickers, a Cerebus bumper sticker, a Diamondback deck (unopened), a signed First American Tour poster, a poster based on the cover of *Cerebus* 53, a Friends of Cerebus 1984 notepad, three issues of *Cerebus the Newsletter,* two 1981 issues of *Miriad* with a Sim interview, a print of soldier Cerebus under full field pack slogging through mud and not seeing a butterfly, *Comics Journals* #s 82–83 with a double-page Sim cover and yet another two-part Sim interview, a "Ho. Ho. Ho." Santa Cerebus card, an actual Sim sketch [dated 10-31-82] of Petunia Con Cerebus drawing rocks, and a certificate that declares the reader to be "more than likely part aardvark"] [it's a *thick* binder, hard to boost one-handed back up onto the shelf, above the bathroom and closet doors of the reader's one-room apartment, next to six other black vinyl binders].

As unlikely as it had seemed to the reader's memory, the words "Blinky Boar and the Strawberry Patch" *had* appeared in *Cerebus* 24. The ground, grown steady again after the reader had finished reading *Cerebus* 183, dimpled like a rubber sheet of Einsteinian spacetime. Aftershock. Not unfamiliar in 1994 Los Angeles. Nor comfortable.

300 issues or 200? Where does the truth lie?

(. . . the truth lie . . .)

The reader had first encountered *Cerebus* with issue 12, and had managed to fill in back to issue 5. Only later, as the *Swords of Cerebus* came out, was the reader gratified to read that it was while drawing *Cerebus* 5 that Sim suddenly "got Cerebus's origin straight" in his head. *Good place for my run to start,* the reader then thought.

It's hard to believe how long ago that was. Sim was still teasing his readers about how long they would have to wait for him to bring Jaka back. Thirty issues, it turned out. It's been more than that since Jaka last actively appeared. The reader notices the wait has not seemed long this time, perhaps because "when will he see the girl again?" no longer seems as

important a question as before.

How priorities change as we grow.

Is that part of what *Cerebus* has done to me? the reader wonders. Or time? Or age?

The reader remembers the "ha-ha" years ["'Give me loot *now* . . . or Cerebus will stuff him up your right nostril'"]. Then the Mind Games began. The reader remembers the reader's twin sketching out the pages of *Cerebus* 20 to reveal their larger import. [Sim reprinted the sketch later for those who'd missed the joke.]

The reader remembers the visual kinesis of the second Mind Game in *Cerebus* 28, and recognized it when Victor Davis verbally reinduced the same kinesis in *Cerebus* 183.

The reader remembers tracing the images of Mind Game III in *Cerebus* 63, only to find the pieces of the puzzle did not *quite* fit together. Will they ever, the reader muses, even after issue 300? (. . . *issue 200?*)

[The reader pauses to note Gerhard's first issue was *Cerebus* 65. In two months the reader will be reading *Cerebus* 185. Happy decade, Gerhard!!]

Mothers & Daughters has seen Mind Games return to *Cerebus* full-time. "Reads" takes them well over the top. (Although, refering to *Cerebus*, the words 'the top' have lost their meaning.) Revelations have undercut everything the reader knew of Cerebus and his world. The very process of reading *Cerebus* has had a spin of infinite regression put on it. And the likelihood of the reader continuing to read *Cerebus* past issue 200 has been put in doubt.

The reader wonders how this will play, a year from now, in the phonebook of "Reads", should there be one. Sim has kneaded the cookie dough of the reader's mind, and has rolled it out into new a shape. Will Sim nibble it raw or bake it? Roll it out long under his palms, or get out his scissors. And. Cut. It. Short?

The reader notes a very real anxiety within, stronger than waiting to catch sight of Jaka once more. This plays well to the usual issue-to-issue format of experiencing *Cerebus*. The tension should not be as strong in the possible telephone book of "Reads", for the answer as to where the 300/200 truth lies will be known by then. (. . . *truth lies* . . .) Nor will readers there have the cover to issue 181 to refer back to.

"Don't you trust me?" If Victor Davis decided as it's stated he did at the news of John Lennon's death, then the reader thinks it not beyond Sim to shock his readers with equally sudden cut short expectations.

When in the past Cerebus has done something disruptive of karma, he has fallen into the mind-games of his own dreams. Should there be issues after 200, and Cerebus still alive to sleep, the dreams should be *quite* intense . . .

Victor reaches the end of the unsigned letter. He looks for its envelope . . .

Envelope. Goddamn it, what did I do with the envelope. I feel like I've been 'Viktor Davised' here.

★★★★★★★★★★

Hello.

I did wonder whether this would be an appropriate place to write and express my angst, but I reckoned, well, everyone else seems to be doing it, so . . . My angst is, I have no angst. I'm thoroughly bored. I've *tried* sex, drugs and rock and roll, *and* exams. I've tried everything I can think of, (and a couple of things I *hadn't* thought of). *Cerebus* and *Shade* and the rest get a bit of a heh, or a hmmm every month (Don't get me wrong, it's a very *approving* heh/hmmm, but it's still only a etc). But that's all.

My life, in fact, is stale, flat, and well, flat.

Anybody out there got any ideas?. Any suggestions gratefully received . . .

Love & hope,

Genevieve
61 Uttoxeter New Rd.
Derby, England
DE22 3NL

Try a really hot bath with two or three gallons of red wine poured into it. In the dark. With candles. During a full moon. Hey, it works for me.

★★★★★★★★★★

Setting: Top of a deserted parking structure (city #4, on second near Arizona), view of the Bay on one side, lights of Century City visible on the other. Clear, cool night, waning gibbous moon high in the sky. Two people leaning against an old Toyota van, doing the heavy breathing thing. They break off.

"What are you thinking about?" she asks.

Well, thinks I, I *was* thinking about taking you into this van, ripping off all your clothing and making wild, passionate love to you until we a) were rousted and arrested by the police or b) turned blue, passed out, and awoke several hours later, sated and exhausted. Whichever came first. *NOW*, I am thinking about what mental reservations you may be harboring to lead you to engage in such a blatant stalling tactic and how my chances of getting any tonight just went down the toilet, for, as everybody knows, there is no real answer to that question. What does she *think* I'm thinking about? the latest stock market figures? The price of tea in China? Belly button lint? *WHAT?*

So I kiss her. "That." I say. "You?"

"That too" she says. Somehow I doubt it.

At least we went Dutch.

Dignity and a Plum,

Rev. Gregory M. Flanders
435 22nd Street
Santa Monica, CA
USA 90402

Sounds like she's got a bad case of Genevieve Syndrome.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

OK, so I stuck it up a little further. If was painful. But also a little exciting.

Love,

Eolake Stobblehouse
Sorgenfrivej 3
2800 Lyngby
Denmark

PS: I don't suppose you'll pay for the replacement copy?

Don't *ever* ask me to autograph the damn thing, that's all.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Talk about synchronicity!

I just bought my latest batch of comics, and read issue #7 of *The Maxx*, enjoying it immensely. I then read issue #181 of *Cerebus*, and I also enjoyed that quite a bit. The last page was very effective. Anyway, as is my habit, I went on to read the Aardvark Comment. I read Bruce Harper's letter (regarding *Maxx*), and your reply to it, and I thought *Yeah,* Maxx *really is some of the best of what Image has to offer.* A little bit later, feeling some responsibility as

a comics retailer, I flipped through the "Image Scene '94", which I had received with our store's latest shipment. This book previewed Image's upcoming material for 1994-95. After having a good laugh at the comment about *Pitt* ("Bi-monthly is as good as it's going to get." — Yeah, if that!), and seeing the latest *X-Men* clones, I found the page on *Maxx*. I quote from this page: "*MAXX* is the underdog of the Image universe!" For those of you who haven't seen this preview book, most of the items described within it have at least half a page devoted to them. This includes *Pitt* and all of the *X-Men* clones. How much of a blurb does *Maxx*, probably the most original and interesting Image book, get?

Three lines. No more. *And* they misspelled Bill Loebs' name.

To me, Image has not yet realized the true purpose of their company. They are to be applauded for being a creator-owned organization, but they are often overly influenced by the Big Two, Marvel and DC. As such, they do not realize what they have in *Maxx*. Image seems to favor unoriginal, overused ideas like *WildC.A.T.S.* or *Supreme* over truly unique things like *Maxx*. This is the major problem with Image, and Defiant, and Valiant, and Marvel, and yes, even DC. Conversely, this is the strength of *Starchild, Hepcats, Bone, Maxx, Sandman, Hellblazer,* and, of course, *Cerebus.*

You may not remember, but I met you, and Neil, and Martin, and Jeff, and James, at Diamond Seminar '93, last year. We spent, along with a whole bunch of others, a couple of hours in your suite, talking comics (and ripping on *Plasm*). I learned more then, talking to all of you, then at any other time during the Seminar. You told me then basically what you said in your OZCON address, as reprinted in *Cerebus* #181. I advise all comics retailers to read this address. It's true, and our store is living proof. Since the '93 Seminar, I have started cutting the chaff from our store's stock, and ordering, as Dave put it, the kind of comics I am proud to sell. I want our store to be known for quality, and for the enthusiasm of the employees. Since these new orders have come into effect, we have begun to sell more comics. Since *Starchild* has started coming out regularly, it has begun to sell. In fact, for the past two months, it has *sold out.* Ditto *Bone.* Ditto *Sandman.* Ditto *Maxx.* Ditto *Cerebus.* Part of the reason for these books selling is that I, and those I work with, can recommend all of these titles to the customers. I am proud to sell these books — *all* of them. Any retailers out there, listen to what Dave has to say. He's right. Customers do vote with their wallets. Buy merchandise you can be proud to sell, and it will. That's the only way to go.

Thanks, Dave. You've changed our store, and my life. I owe you big.

Till #300 and beyond,

Rich Stoehr
Bookman's Used Books
1520 S. Riordan Ranch Road
Flagstaff, AZ
USA 86001

P.S. I've got to admit, I'm rooting for James in your bet with him.

Thanks for the vote of confidence. That James has really turned into a *Starchild* House on Fire, hasn't he?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

I am an actor in training, in one of the worst places this could possibly occur: A university. I have big plans about opening my own theatre company here in little ol' Townsville (Australia for those who read the address last), but at the moment I am in a lull. Talking and writing assignments about acting and acting styles is like trying to explain a *Far Side* comic over the phone. It just doesn't happen. Soon however, we are going on the road with one of the greatest plays written this century, Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter.* This is the only thing from which I get any satisfaction in life at the moment.

I think that misery is the greatest inspiration to art. If this is so, you must be a very lonely guy. I find that I am doing my best work now, even though I live in a place where no-one talks to me, just painfully split from two girlfriends (LONG story. Women around me at the moment seem to think that because you are wrong, in their opinion, that you feel no pain about anything), and hate the 'liberal education' that I am getting.

I can directly relate everything you have been saying in my four issues of *Cerebus'* (170, and then 180, 181, 182) to my own situation and my own creativity. Thank you for keeping me going, in your own way.

Ben Baker, Western Halls
James Cook University
Townsville 4811
Australia

Well, we sort of have to keep each other going any way that we can. As Truman Capote once said, 'The dogs howl, but the caravan rolls on.'

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

All I want is a kiss. A kiss from you, Dave. A kiss from you to me is the only kind of autograph I will accept. The memory of that kiss would be worth more than any rendering of your name on paper. I have no sexual intentions of a groupie nor desire to tell all later to bring notoriety to myself. This is what I will ask for if you ever visit the great Northwest (especially the Boise area) making personal appearances. I'm not including my address simply because you already have it on file. Take care Dave, and thank you for *Cerebus.*

Stephanie Green

P.S. This letter was an honest reaction to issue #183.

I don't mean to sound . . . *ungrateful* or anything, but Boise is an awfully long way to go for one kiss. Oh well, it's a long life. Maybe I'll see you at a convention somewhere or something.

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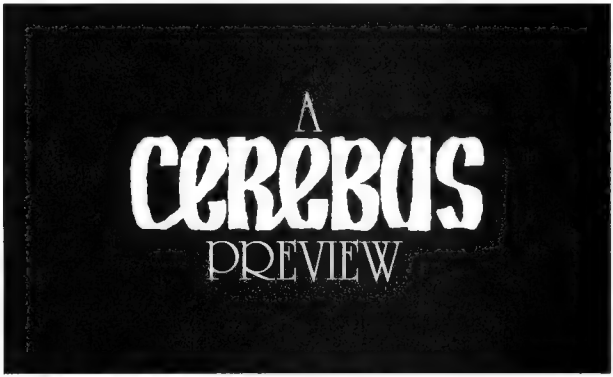

The first picture I remember drawing was a portrait of a Tyrannosaurus Rex roaring. It was a scratchy little thing, and I seemed to be the only person in the room who could identify it as being a T. Rex, but it was the first drawing I recall caring a great deal about.

My obsession with drawing really took root that moment, initiating a path I have walked (and on occasion run) for over 35 years. The last 18 years have "legitimized" the urge into a profession. I've had my ups and downs. I've earned a dubious reputation as a slow and undependable artist. I've also won a good share of industry awards for my work as an artist, writer, and editor/publisher.

Funny thing is, for the bulk of those 18 years I've rarely derived the pleasure I savored at age three, struggling my way through that first T. Rex.

That truth prompted me to consider how far I'd wandered off my chosen path.

It took all of three years to find my way back. Three years of cutting ties (personal and professional), negotiating settlements, drawing the one and only honest-to-Christ superhero series I ever drew to earn enough to settle the debts I'd taken on straying off the straight and narrow. It wasn't really time wasted: I did learn how to publish, and why I should only fret over publishing my own work. I learned once and for all that any further investment in any "company plan" is a complete waste of my time and energy.

But I made it, damn it. I stumbled back on to the path, and since January of this year, I've rediscovered what it was that made a three-year-old boy happy

You know what? It wasn't a childish obsession at all. Other artists — great artists, like Charles Knight, Rudolph Zallinger, Zdenak Burian, William Stout, and others — have dedicated their very lives to a similar path.

But none of them did so as story-tellers.

I'm not in the same league with those master artists, but I do know how to tell a story.

Well, I guess I finally figured out what I want to do when I grow up.

TYRANT.

The birth, life and death of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Written, drawn, and published by yours truly, with considerable input from a number of experts in the paleontological community who've taken an interest. A tale that will take me more than ten years to tell in twenty-to-twenty-four-page bi-monthly installments.

I haven't enjoyed myself this much in years.

As I write this, I'm midway through completing my third issue — over fifty pages done in the time it used to take me to simply *begin* negotiating a contract with DC or Dark Horse or Tundra, a contract that usually meant nothing but more waiting; the time I used to struggle to put a fraction of one issue of *Taboo* together; the time I used to piss away hoping some editor or publisher would deign to read a project proposal and maybe, MAYBE respond to it.

Now, I only have to negotiate my way through this wonderful primordial forest.

TYRANT'S forest.

Imagine the unhindered growth of the woodlands of what we now call Alberta, Canada, over 65 million years ago. It brims with life from the still-familiar amphibian and bird forms to the explosive proliferation of flowering plants to the dinosaurs themselves: Triceratops, Tyrannosaurus Rex, and more. It is, for me, a dreamscape in more ways than one, creating the most compelling reconstruction of a dinosaur's life I can, while building my own base of curative autonomy. I'm already enjoying a freedom in writing and drawing Tyrant I haven't experienced before, and feel I'm doing my best work ever as a result.

And the adventure is only beginning.

Come along.

Enjoy this final *Cerebus* preview of my first issue, which will ship in September from Spider Baby Grafix

Welcome to the world of *TYRANT.*

THERE ARE MONSTERS IN THE MIST.

THEY SHUFFLE THROUGH THE SHROUDED LOWLANDS...

... DRAWN TO THE MORNING STARS.

ONCE THEY HAVE FOUND THE STARS, NOTHING CAN MOVE THEM FROM THEIR FAVORITE FEEDING GROUNDS.
GRUUNK
EEEEE
NOTHING.
EEEEOOONNNNNNK

JUST AS NOTHING COULD EVER DRIVE THE HERD FROM ITS NESTING GROUNDS.
NOTHING.
EEEEEONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
THE BROOD SHIVERS AS THE ECHOES FADE.
THEIR MOTHERS NESTED HERE, AS HAD THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE THEM.
ONK
ONK
NK!
UNTIL THIS MORNING, HERE THEY HAVE FEARED ONLY THE LITTLE CARNIVORES-- THE EGGSUCKERS.
THE EGGSUCKER WATCHES THE BROOD ATTENTIVELY. PERHAPS THE DREAD HE CAN SMELL IN THE ECHOES' WAKE WILL PRESENT AN OPPORTUNITY-- A VULNERABLE HATCHLING UNGUARDED, A TENDER INFANT TUMBLED FROM THE LITTER.
THEY HAVE BECOME LESS VULNERABLE EVERY DAY. BUT STILL HE WATCHES, FRETING UPON THE NEST AS HAD HIS FATHER, AND HIS FATHER'S FATHER.

THE ELDER BROOD MOTHER COCKS HER HEAD, JUDGING THE FINAL ECHO.
SHE HAS ALWAYS BEEN CONFUSED BY ECHOES. SHE CAN NEVER MAKE SENSE OF THEIR MANY DIRECTIONS.
SHE KNOWS THEIR SOURCE IS CLOSE -- THEY RESOUND FROM THIS SIDE OF THE HILL.
SHE CAN NO LONGER BEAR HER OWN LITTER AND WILL SUFFER NO MALE'S ADVANCES. STILL, SHE IS THE ELDER, AND HAS HER ROLE.
SHE KNOWS AND IS KNOWN
FOR INSTANCE, EGGSUCKERS KNOW AND FEAR HER.
AND SHE ALONE KNOWS, AND PROPERLY FEARS, THIS MORNING'S DISTURBANCE.
EGG

EEE ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
THE ELDER WAS BORN HERE. SHE NESTED AND RAISED HER OWN LITTERS HERE. UNTIL NOW, THEY WERE SAFE HERE.
THIS BELLOWING STRIKES A MUCH DEEPER FEAR IN HER OWN BREAST THAN THAT FELT BY THE REST OF THE DEN MOTHERS AND THEIR YOUNG...
SHE RECOGNIZES THE URGENCY AND PATTERN IN THE SCREAMS.
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
ONK
EVERYTHING -- EVERYTHING -- IS SHAKEN. CAN ONE MORNING SO CHANGE THE WORLD?
ONK
THIS BROOD WILL HAVE TO MATURE QUICKLY.
THIS IS NO LONGER SAFE GROUND.

EGGSUCKER RUNS. NOT OUT OF FEAR OF THE OLD COW, BUT BECAUSE HE, TOO, RECOGNIZES THE PATTERN AND TENOR OF THE SCREAMS.

AN EGG-LAYER.

A NEW NEST.

CLOSE BY.

CLOSE.

EEEEE
EEEE

THERE.
ONK
ONK
ONK
HERE.

From the creator of MEGATON MAN™ comes...

One Universe, One Comic Book.

--Why Pay More?!?

Speculator's Item First Issue!!!

Don Simpson's Bizarre Heroes #1.
A monthly, ongoing, black & white, 32-page standard format comic book for all ages, $2.95. Coming in May from

FIASCO COMICS

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SWEET AND SIM ANNOUNCE '40 AND 5' PROPOSAL

JULY 14, 1994

In response to rapidly changing market conditions, Preston A. Sweet 'Small Store Strategy' columnist for *Comics Retailer* and Dave Sim, publisher and creator of *Cerebus* are proposing the adoption of a '40 and 5' program of standard direct trade terms between comics publishers and retailers.

'40 and 5' refers to a standard 40% discount off the cover price on an order of 5 or more copies from a publisher's back stock (not necessarily all the same issue). Payment would accompany the order and the publisher would pay basic shipping costs (either surface mail or UPS).

Sweet explained, "The current distribution system is set up to do two things: distribute new books as soon as they are published, and fill reorders for these books shortly after their release. It performs both of these tasks very well and the system is ideal for the vast majority of titles which have minimal demand a month or so after release.

"However, there are titles which will have demand for months or even years after they are published. This is particularly true for many small press titles where a retailer often wants to keep all back issues in stock in order to attract new readers. As currently implemented, the distribution system is unable to efficiently meet the long-term demands for these books. For example, when I first tried to get back issues of *Wandering Star* through my distributor, the orders were cancelled. So, I contacted the publisher and ordered them directly. Since then I have placed about ten more direct back issue orders, and made *Wandering Star* one of my top sellers."

"This is not a unique circumstance," adds Dave Sim. "While a hierarchical system of publisher to distributor to retailer works on current issues of mainstream titles, a back issue system which supports both distributor and retailer orders has proven more effective with the small press. The best example is *Bone*. Because Cartoon Books fills individual orders for back issues from retailers, a retailer is able to order five or ten copies at a time and, over the course of the 60 days between current issues, is able to generate and meet the demand for *Bone* in his store on an ongoing basis. By being able to identify and fill this demand, the retailer has the confidence to increase his orders on future issues. The result has been a steep climb in distributor orders for recent issues of *Bone*. Without the distribution system these orders could not be filled, BUT, without the direct link established between Cartoon Books and individual retailers it is unlikely that new issue demand would have reached this level so quickly.

"Now clearly — for a well-established publisher like Aardvark-Vanaheim — an order for five back issues is not going to represent a major profit center. However, for a small press title, especially one just starting to find its audience, such orders will likely be the building blocks to finding the readership necessary for their survival. It also gives the self-publisher or small publisher a clearer picture of which stores to target for special promotions, signings, etc. Brian Hibbs (a San Francisco retailer) told me in 1991 that 5% of stores probably accounted for 90% of *Cerebus'* sales. For a beginning publisher, that ratio is even more dramatic and maintaining a reliable, ongoing supply of back issues to these stores may spell the difference between success and failure. Making a small profit is a small price for any publisher to pay to find new readers and new retail outlets."

Sweet added, "I've always felt that market penetration is the key for a small publisher to move from a subsistence level of sales to one that can provide some level of security. You would be hard pressed to find a comic book store that does not carry *Cerebus*, and I expect the same will soon be true for *Bone*. As a retailer I'll often read a review or see an ad and think I might want to give a book a shot. Of course, that means waiting until the next issue is solicited (which could be weeks or months away) or, even worse, never placing an order because the title isn't carried by my distributor. (This may be an even bigger problem for retailers who use smaller distributors. One retailer told me that his distributor doesn't offer *Starchild*.) In either case, if retailers could immediately translate interest into a small wholesale order I think we would see more stores trying more small press titles."

Currently several of the major distributors are working to improve reorder processing, a move both Sweet and Sim applaud. As Sim explained, "The '40 and 5' program can be viewed as a temporary measure to bridge the gap between current systems which *don't* work for long-term demand and future systems which *will*. Of course, most self-published and small press titles are hanging on by their fingernails, and it's unrealistic to tell them that help is on the way and ask them to hang on until then. They simply don't

have the capital to sustain them through a 'wait-and-see' period. Similarly, this proposal is not meant to discourage back issue relists through distributors. In fact, if this program is successful I hope it will demonstrate to everyone that there is enough demand to justify more relists in distributor catalogs."

Preston Sweet, who originally proposed the program to Sim in March of this year, wishes to emphasize that these terms should be viewed as a 'minimum' and that publishers could set up better terms with retailers on a case-by-case basis. The development of the program came about through his frustration in having to contact individual publishers to determine, first of all, if they participated in wholesale terms to retailers on back issues and, if so, what these terms were (minimums, discounts, payments, etc.) It often seemed easier to tell a customer to order single copies direct from the publisher than go through the time and effort involved. He felt both publishers and retailers would benefit by a standard set of terms which could be referenced in the books themselves as well as advertisements and reviews in much the same way as single-copy terms are already presented.

Dave Sim sees the '40 and 5' program as a solution to many of the problems facing new and smaller self-publishers and the small press. Because the 40% discount gives the publisher (on average) 20% more revenue per book, it is possible to pay the shipping without losing money, making the program even more attractive to retailers.

Both Sim and Sweet recognize that, for the program to work, both retailers and publishers must act responsibly. As Sweet explained, "For a retailer the most important thing is to get the books quickly. I think if a publisher can't respond to a retailer order within 14 days of receipt, then he or she probably shouldn't take direct orders. Since publishers would get paid in advance, they are saved the hassles of collections. Of course, if a retailer bounces a check then he or she needs to make the check good and reimburse the publisher for any bank fees they incurred. It's then up to the publisher to decide if he or she wants to continue dealing with this retailer and, if so, what payment terms would be acceptable."

"It's not a perfect world." Sim stated. "There are risks in the way things currently work, and this proposal has risks too. But let's not let a few bad apples spoil the whole barrel. The benefits to everyone involved should clearly outweigh the risks."

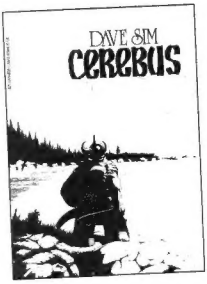
Preston Sweet's final comment: "I'm certain some people may view this proposal as being 'anti-distributor'. This is simply not true. We are not trying to undercut the distributors on price, nor are we proposing direct sales of new issues as they are released. It's just that the current distribution system is often the 'wrong tool' to process these orders. I know from experience that being able to maintain a stock of back issues of a small press title helps me attract new readers, which means bigger distributor orders of future issues."

For further information contact . . .

Preston A. Sweet, Owner
Main Street Comics
2351 College Station Road, Suite 447
Athens, California
USA 30605

Telephone: (706) 548-0943
(please leave message)

CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF

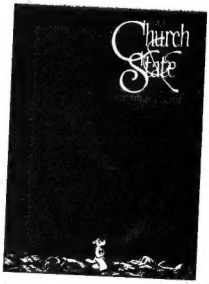


CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25
500 pages $25

The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Red Sophia, Jaka, the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more.

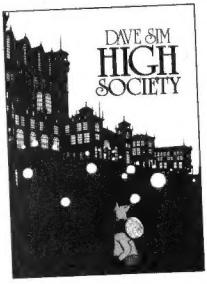
HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50
500 pages $25

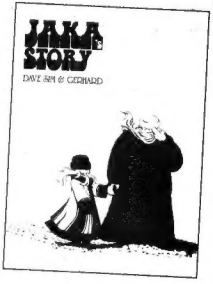
Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in Iest and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Filgate, Blakely, the Regency Elf, Dirty Fleagle and his brother Dirty Drew McGrew, Duke Leonardi. The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted Iestan police.



CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II
reprints Cerebus 51 to 111
1200 pages $30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics. Manipulated by President Weisshaupt, Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henrot-Gutch (Cerebus' mother-in-law), Boobah, Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also, in volume II, is the Flaming Carrot cross-over.





JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136
500 pages $25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner, and Mrs. Thatcher.

MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150
250 pages $17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll, Missy and his sword. The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde. The Roach becomes normalroach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie. Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef.

THE SECOND HALF BEGINS IN 1993:

FLIGHT reprinting Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages ($17)

and

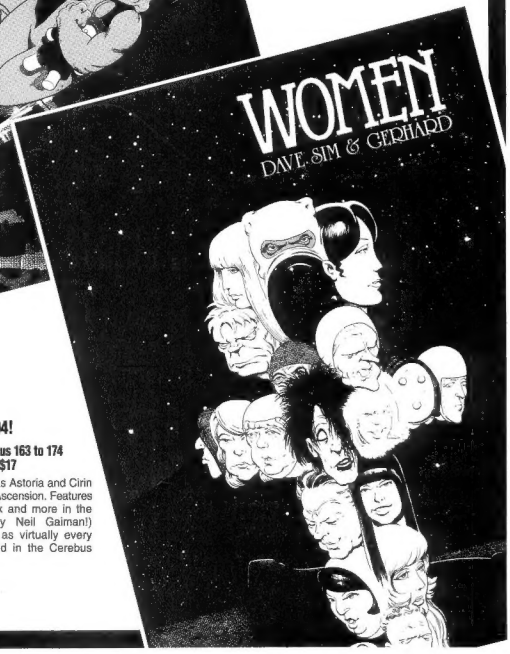
CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
(reprinting the 'in-between' stories from Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) ($2.25)

AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC.
Box 1674, Station C,
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4R2
519-576-7820
or
519-576-0610

THE SECOND HALF BEGINS HERE

FLIGHT reprints Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages $17

Cerebus explodes into action in the second half of the 300 issue story-line. Trapped in lest, hunted by the Cirinists, Cerebus battles back. Featuring Punisherroach as well as the unexpected reappearance of many early Cerebus characters, including the first (visual) appearance of Suenteus Po!



NEW IN '94!

WOMEN reprints Cerebus 163 to 174
250 pages $17

The second half continues as Astoria and Cirin contend for the fabled Final Ascension. Features Swoon, Snuff, Sleaze, Sulk and more in the highly-acclaimed (even by Neil Gaiman!) Sandman parody, as well as virtually every female character introduced in the Cerebus storyline to date.

The Donkey. The Lima Bean. And Mrs. Lima Bean. In San Juan, Puerto Rico. On the beach. On a very nice day. 'Ho ho,' says the Lima Bean, 'The Donkey is JEALOUS for there is no fine-looking Mrs. Donkey for *him*.' The Donkey is smiling. Lima Beans never *learn*.

Photo by the Background Donkey